

6.3 Social stories

‘Social stories are short, written stories, originally intended for children with autism, to help understand a small part of their social world and behave appropriately within it. Each social story provides a child with clear, concise and accurate information about what is happening in a specific social situation, outlining both why it is happening and what a typical response might be’. (Smith, Caroline, ‘Writing and Developing Social Stories’, 2003)

6.3.1 Social story 1

Louise started school when she was four years old. She is in an ASD-specific class. There are six children in the class and four special needs assistants (SNAs). Louise presents with very challenging behaviour and requires rigid structures and routines in the classroom to help her cope in the environment. She uses a written schedule. Academically she is at an age-appropriate level. Louise loves social outings but unless structures and visual cues are in place, she finds it difficult to cope.

What the teacher / school did

When I first took Louise to ‘The Diner’ I observed the following problems:

- She only wanted chicken curry, rice and chips, nothing else would do!
- She wanted to sit in a particular seat (in view of the television).
- She would stand and wait with her tray in her hand at the counter while the food was being cooked. She refused to sit down and demanded her food from the waitress and chef.

These behaviours occurred each time we visited ‘The Diner’. Negative reinforcement had had no success, e.g. ‘if you don’t sit down, you will have to go back to school’. As I was using social stories to address other behaviours, I thought I would use this approach to address the problems Louise was having.

The first step was to sit down and write the general rules I felt that Louise should adhere to when in ‘The Diner’.

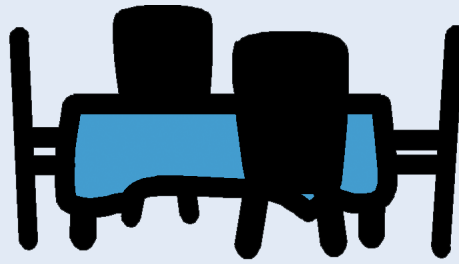
I used a board marker to present the rules visually.

I used a combination of written words and symbols as Louise can read but also enjoys the visual cues of the symbol.

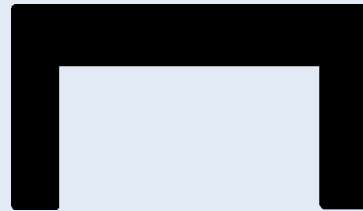
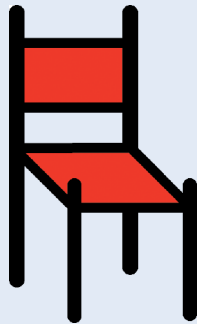
I took Louise to a quiet corner in the classroom and we read through the story. She enjoyed the story and seemed to accept the rules as presented to her.

Social Story 1

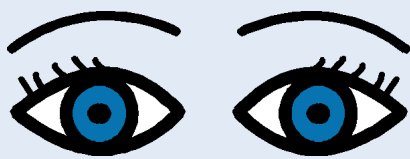
Going to 'The Diner'



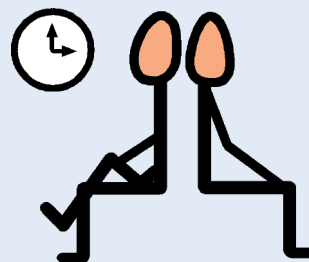
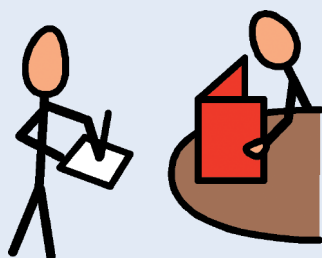
When I go to The Diner I must choose a table that no one is sitting at.



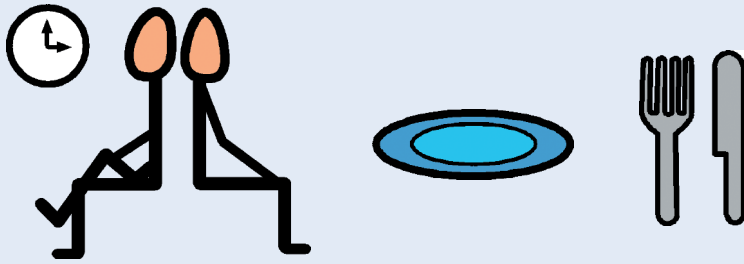
Sometimes the food I want is not on the menu and I must choose another dinner.



When I place my order I must sit and wait for my food.



I must wait until everybody has finished their food.



I will take my money to the till with an adult and pay for my food.



Everybody is happy when I am good in The Diner.



The following week when we went up to 'The Diner', Louise, for the first time, chose fish and chips from the menu. She waited (albeit impatiently) at the table for her food to be cooked. We noticed a marked improvement in her behaviour. Since the social story has been introduced, Louise's choices now include a wider variety of food e.g. chicken and chips, lasagne, chips and coleslaw.

Over the next three weeks, two problems arose. On one occasion there was no menu at our table, so Louise walked over to another table and took the menu from under a woman's plate. I verbally corrected her for this, but I had to revise the social story and include, 'If there is no menu at my table, I must ask another person if I can borrow their menu'.

On another occasion, a gentleman asked to borrow a menu from our table. I gave it to him as we had ordered our meal. Louise got very upset and kept shouting, 'Are you finished with my menu?' I realised that although the social story worked well in this scenario, I needed to constantly monitor it and change it accordingly.

Special needs assistant's story

When we would visit 'The Diner' as a class group, Louise had difficulty waiting for her turn to order. She also had difficulty waiting for her food to be cooked and in choosing different meals, as she tended to opt for the same thing every time. Since the introduction of the social story, she is now willing to wait her turn and sit quietly while her food is being prepared. She will now choose different food from the menu. I thought she was doing brilliantly until recently. While on a visit to 'The Diner', a man came over to her table and asked to look at the menu (which she had sitting in front of her). As she had placed her order for her dinner, the teacher said, 'Yes.' Louise got very annoyed by this and kept referring to it as 'her menu'. She kept looking towards the man to see if he had finished with it. The social story had to be changed to include a scenario like this.

Parent's story

Louise was always difficult to take to a restaurant. She was very impatient and always wanted her food right away. If she didn't get her food when she wanted it, she would start to cry and scream. Louise loves chicken curry, rice and chips and she would always request this when in a restaurant. We didn't realise the problem that this would cause until, one day, when this was not on the menu, Louise would not settle for any other food and started to cry. She eventually accepted chips. Louise's behaviour has improved at the restaurant and she will now wait for the food. Before we go to the restaurant we now say, 'If there is no chicken curry on the menu you will have to choose something else.' She does agree, and most of the time this is not a problem anymore. I give her money and she will come up and pay for her food when the meal is over.

Staff at 'The Diner'

I found it difficult when the class came to 'The Diner' to begin with. When the young girl would shout and scream, I didn't know what to do. I would ask the chef to have the children's meals ready as quickly as possible, as I knew they found it difficult to wait. I soon realised that it was easier for me to take the orders from the table than to have them come to the counter, as they would take some time deciding and then the queue would build up. The children now wear uniforms and I find this helps, as I can identify them as having special needs. I can have tables joined together, give them longer time to choose their food and, if there is screaming, I don't pass any remarks. I feel that the class has settled in 'The Diner' and are well behaved.

Targets for visiting 'The Diner'

These are the targets as outlined in Louise's IEP.

Targets year 1

- To choose a table at which no one is sitting
- To wait at her table for food (not at counter)
- To choose a meal that is on the menu
- To wait until everyone has finished his / her meal
- To pay for food at the till when finished her meal

Targets for year 2

- To borrow a menu from another table if there is no menu at her table

6.3.2 Social story 2

Transitioning to a new school can be a difficult time for young pupils with ASD. It could be a move from special to mainstream, mainstream to special or primary to secondary.

With this in mind, the following story was written by a member of the Education Board's Support Service. It has eased the transition for several pupils who have moved to our school.

My name is

Soon school will stop for the summer holidays.

..... **will tell me when this will be.**

For **weeks I will not go to school.**

..... **will tell me when the**

holidays have finished and when school will start.

When it is time to start school I will be going to a different school.

My new school is called

I will have a new teacher too.

My new teacher will be called

The name of my new classroom will be

..... **will buy me a new school uniform.**

This is a special uniform for my new school. Most of the other boys and

girls in my new school will wear this special uniform.

It can be fun to have a school uniform.

When I start my new school I will meet new friends.

..... **will tell me the**
names of the boys and girls in my new class. It is good to meet new
boys and girls.

..... **will teach me**
some interesting things. Most boys and girls like the teacher to show
them new things. It is good to learn new things.

This can be fun.

At the end of my first day at my new school, my teacher will tell the
other children and me when it is time to go home. I will see

..... **and the other**
children the next day.

When I see my mummy and daddy I can tell them all about my new
school. Mummy and Daddy will be pleased to hear all about my new
school.

It can be fun to go to a new school.

The above story is a template which is useful in a variety of settings and especially when customised for individuals. It is clear and simple in its presentation and the visual format (we often include photographs) is particularly valuable, as our pupils often have a difficult time understanding most of the verbal information presented to them.